

## Employment Past, Present, and Future

Robert E. Wright, Nef Family Chair of Political Economy

### Description:

The goal of this interdisciplinary lecture and discussion course is to introduce students to the various ways in which human beings have “made a living” in the past, how they do so now, and how they are likely to do so in the future so that students can make more informed decisions about their choice of career or vocation.

### Course objectives:

- 1) **describe** and
- 2) **evaluate** the past, present, and future of five different ways that humans “make a living”;
- 3) **assess** how employment trends may influence their own lives and search for vocation.

### Weeks/topics:

1. Hunting and gathering
  2. Horticulture/agriculture
  3. Investment (real and financial: bonds, stocks, mortgages)
  4. Proprietorship/entrepreneurship (ownership and management of business)
  5. Hiring of others/employment I: enslavement, coercive (debt peonage, apprenticeships, internships)
  6. MIDTERM
  7. Hiring of others/employment II: “free” wage
    - \*long-term contract, employment or consultative
    - \*short-term contract, employment or consultative
    - \*at-will
    - \*independent contractor/consultant
  10. The “gig” economy
  11. Future scenarios:
    - \*no work necessary
    - \*no employment = all proprietorship/gig
    - \*more slavery or bonded labor
  12. REFLECTIVE ESSAY PRESENTATIONS
- REFLECTIVE ESSAY DRAFTS DUE  
FINAL EXAMINATION  
REFLECTIVE ESSAY FINAL DUE

### Books:

Hunting, gathering, early agriculture → excerpts from Mithen’s *After the Ice*  
History of investing → Reamer and Downing *Investment: A History*  
Entrepreneurship/proprietorship → excerpts from Wright’s *Little Business on the Prairie*  
Slavery overview → excerpts from Wright’s *Poverty of Slavery* and *Fubarnomics*  
Hiring of others → Kaufman, *Hired Hands or Human Resources?*

Present → Oberholtzer, *The Hustle Economy*

Future → Ford, *Rise of the Robots: Technology and the Threat of a Jobless Future*

Assessments:

Attendance 10

Midterm 20

Reflective Essay Presentation 20

Reflective Essay Draft 10

Reflective Essay Final 20

Final 20

Assessment to course objectives map:

Midterm Exam → course objective #1 = *describe* 5 ways of making a living, past, present, and future

Final Exam → course objective #2 = *evaluate* 5 ways of making a living, past, present, and future

Reflective Essay → course objective #3 = An essay of circa 3,000 words discussing how the course has influenced the student's thinking about his or her career/vocation. First given as a presentation, then a paper draft, and then a final, polished essay.